

SERBIA | DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES TO DISPLACEMENT

Context – Displacement Situation

Serbia is located along the route used by refugees and migrants seeking safety in the European Union. The municipalities of Preševo on the southern border with FYR Macedonia, the capital Belgrade, Subotica and Horgos on the northern border with Hungary, Šid on the western border with Croatia, and Dimitrovgrad, Negotin, Zaječar and Bosilegrad on the eastern border with Bulgaria are the most affected.

In 2015, more than 823,000 refugees and migrants passed through Serbia. Over 96,000 refugees and migrants reached Serbia in the first three months of 2016.¹ The Government of Serbia, with the help of the international community, has been providing support to ensure their safe and dignified stay in the country. In late 2015, the Government started identifying and implementing solutions to accommodate refugees for a prolonged stay in the facilities located along the migration route.

On 8 March 2016, Serbia and other Western Balkan countries practically closed their borders to the displaced population following the conditional agreement between the EU and Turkey to return refugees back to Turkey. Despite this, around 4,000 people still entered Serbia, with approximately 900 currently present in the country. The most affected municipalities faced an increased pressure on the delivery of basic services, depreciation of municipal assets and access to livelihood opportunities. As a result, community cohesion has increasingly become strained. In general, the local population demonstrated solidarity with the incoming flow of migrants during 2015 and 2016. And yet, a UNDP survey in 2016 demonstrated an overwhelming opposition by the local population to any kind of permanent settlement by the new arrivals in Serbia.



Improved garbage collection in Preševo (Photo: UNDP Serbia)

RESULTS

UNDP Serbia's support to basic services, ensured continuity of water service for 35,000 people in Preševo, and reduced water loss by 20 percent.

In the town of Šid, UNDP renovated two water wells to increase yields by up to 50 percent, ensuring uninterrupted water supply.

UNDP supported waste collection in the municipality of Preševo – collecting 40m³ of waste per day, permanently cleaning waste bottlenecks, and providing an additional 500 garbage containers, thus extending waste collection services to an additional 6,000 citizens.

UNDP equipped public utility workers with appropriate equipment, and supported their planning and organization. This included improvement of a waste collection plan that would provide increased coverage of residents; the development of software to implement a unified financial system for utility services; and the introduction of fiscal cash registers for better payment control.

¹ Source: Serbian Ministry of Interior.



Displaced people gathered in Serbia (Photo: UNDP Serbia)

Main thematic areas of UNDP's work

UNDP Serbia currently provides support to:

1. Increasing resilience of local communities to cope with the migrant and refugee crisis, as part of the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RRMRP, Europe 2016);
2. Strengthening coordination and municipal response to the migration and refugee crisis and strengthening local resilience.

These projects are predominantly focused on supporting local authorities in the delivery of basic services, strengthening the capacity of local partners and supporting community cohesion activities.

UNDP is also providing support on the use of data gathering tools, such as surveys and focus group discussions.

Humanitarian partnerships

Since the onset of the migrant and refugee crisis, UNHCR and UNDP have cooperated in ensuring the effective coordination of action, under the umbrella of the Refugee Coordination Model and the ensuing Refugee Theme Group consisting of UN agencies and the IOM.

Both UNDP and UNHCR defined their priorities in cooperation with the local authorities in the affected municipalities. UNHCR has focused on providing durable solutions, protection, shelter, food, WASH and health, filling the gaps primarily in the local health sector and logistics. UNDP has built the capacity of various municipalities' administrations and focused on public utility services, water and waste management, and related reconstruction works.

UNDP leads the RRMRP working group and sector Support to Local Communities, which receives 15% of the current RRMRP budget for Serbia. The group helps to communicate to the local population and Government the economic and other benefits of the presence of the refugee and migrant population. UNDP also supports government partners in strengthening migration policy and mainstreaming migration into national and local development plans.

UNDP-UNHCR partnership moving forward

UNDP and UNHCR will continue to work together under the Refugee Coordination Model and the Refugee Theme Group in assisting the Serbian national and local governments in coordinating central and local responses to the growing challenges posed by the crisis, and work closely with civil society to support and strengthen community cohesion, especially in post-conflict, multiethnic border communities.

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